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I N A
L E T T E R
T O A
N O B L E L O R D .

"The power of the legislative being derived from the people by a positive voluntary grant and institution, can be no other than what that positive grant conveys."

"When the society has placed the legislative in any assembly of men, to continue in them and their successors; the legislative can never revert to the people whilst that government lasts; because, having provided a legislature, with power to continue for ever, they have given up their political power to the legislative, and cannot resume it; but if they have set limits to the duration of their legislative, and make this supreme power in any person or assembly only temporary, at the determination of the time set, it reverts to the society, and the people have a right to place it in new hands."

LOCKE on government.

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T H E
A B U S E
O F
S T A N D I N G P A R L I A M E N T S.

My Lord,

I RESOLVED to dedicate the following sheets to some patron, who never denied access to that which concerns the public good: Your lordship immediately occurred, and prejudice to my own judgement determined me to seek no other. I am no longer sollicitous about the subject, nor ashamed to advance exploded principles to an Englishman, who has ever been unfashionable enough to espouse truth, and so unpolite as to speak his sentiments even in a court.

When I reflect on the constitution of the greatest commonwealths of antiquity, I am not astonished at their declensions. They received the seeds of their decay in their birth, and the strength and power which they displayed for a while, was rather the effect of many concurring circumstances not obvious to human foresight, than the natural consequence of their frame. The true foundation of government was usually mistaken, and though the superstructures were finely contrived, and admirably executed, yet they were at the best like houses built upon sand.

When governments have received an unhappy bias in their original, like individuals who have quitted the right way, every step in their future progress is a greater deviation from the right. It is a maxim of *Machiavel* that governments should as often as possible be brought back to their first principles; and though the general practice of statesmen, disproves this maxim, I have not known it overturned by argument: It is certainly just when applied to well constituted governments, and is in one sense applicable to the worst, that their defects are generally fewest in the beginning; therefore when they revert to their first principles, I may safely say, that they come nearer to perfection.

Two instances occur which seem to confirm the preceding observations. The *Spartans* enjoyed the most perfect of ancient governments; indeed it was formed for preservation not for increase; while they adhered to their original constitution, they were alternately the scourge and the support of their neighbours, and held the balance in *Greece* for many centuries: *Lysander* made a breach in the constitution, by introducing gold and silver among the spoils of *Athen's*,

Athens, and the ruin of the commonwealth was the consequence. The constitution of *Rome* had originally many defects, and the encroachments of bad kings made many more, and at last occasioned a revolution; this change reduced the commonwealth nearer to its first principles, and restored many lost privileges to the people; yet still a proper claim of rights was neglected, and the true foundation of government unknown: The commonwealth was still unequal, and deviated every day more and more from perfection; consequently it was a perpetual scene of contest between the people for privilege, and the senate for prerogative.

But I hasten from this view of ancient commonwealths, and turn my eyes to my native country, with design to mark some change in our constitution, if such hath been, or could be, till corruption had prevailed among all ranks of men; and if it appears that a deviation from the constitution will lead to the ruin of our island, I hope your lordship will so far concur with *Machiavel*, that when such deviation happens, the best method of preserving our government, is to bring it back to its first principles.

It would be impossible to fix a time when our constitution was perfect; all the effects of human invention are as imperfect and changeable as their causes; but it will not be difficult to determine a period when the pillars of our government stood unshaken, by which I understand, first, a balance of property in the hands of the people; secondly, a proper rotation of officers, and especially of the representative body of the nation. These I conceive to be the essence of a just commonwealth, the trunk from which all the orders of government spring, like branches, and derive their beauty, strength, and majesty: If this foundation be removed, government may

may remain, but a free government never can subsist without it.

Before the reign of *Henry the seventh*, the balance of property was uncertain, it leaned to the nobles, and to that cause the dissentions and wars of the barons and clergy may be attributed; their property placed the sword in their hands, and the people were little better than vassals. You will perhaps ask, was not *Britain* free before *Henry the seventh*? And I must answer that it was only free in Part; nay I will venture to go further and to say, that it was owing to our situation, to some most excellent princes, and to the vigour of our constitution in some parts, that its defects in other points did not bring absolute slavery upon us. *Rome* affords a signal proof that many great concurring circumstances may supply for a while a defect in the frame of government. All the dissensions and at last the ruin of that city were owing to the balance of property being fixed in the hands of the nobles. Yet by the strength of other parts of the constitution, by steady national principles, and most eminently by a rotation of offices, *Rome* became the seat of universal empire. A rotation of offices raised her to grandeur, and when her conquests had deprived her of all opportunities of increase, she wanted a due balance of property to secure her preservation, and her own luxury soon destroyed her.

If the time of *Henry the seventh*, was the memorable æra when power devolved to the multitude; I shall fix the reign of queen *Elizabeth* to be the glorious scene, when the people had property, when offices circulated and elections were free: A reign which the present times and posterity shall review with wonder; in which the people esteemed it a favour to serve their princess, and the princess thought it her glory and found it her happiness to protect and reward

ward her people : The reign of a queen who governed all by all, whose wisdom scorned the low assistance of party, yet disarmed more factions than the greatest tyrant could raise : Whose honours invested the brow of merit; whose counsels and magnanimity restored an expiring commonwealth to the happiest state, a state of liberty : Whose œconomy supported her magnificence, while her arms were the terror of *Europe*, and her fleets carried the glory of her name as far as waters rolled.

I could not mention that princess, without feeling some transport, without paying some tribute to her memory ; I shall consider her reign as the season when the *British* liberties were best secured, and the government most perfect. If in the course of this letter it shall appear from natural reason or from example that all changes in our constitution so settled, either are or must be the causes of national calamities ; I may fairly conclude that an adherence, or return to our constitution, when we have strayed from it, are the surest means of the safety and long life of our commonwealth.

In the early ages of this kingdom, a bad prince found a short step to tyranny by flattering his nobles, and the people instead of one had many times an hundred masters. But now since property is transferred to the many, that power which is consequent thereof is not to be shaken without difficulty : Therefore bad kings who would tyrannize without controul, must try new means of supporting their bad measures ; they must endeavour to sap another essential part of our government, to destroy the rotation of offices and frequent popular elections, or their tyranny may return upon themselves, and the crown drop from their brows.

Such reflections lead me to consider the use of frequent elections, and the great abuse of a standing parliament. To enter on such a subject, is like treading on enchanted ground, where the flowery prospect conceals a thousand pitfalls : Yet a secret charm results from the very difficulties, with which truth is surrounded, and the dangers to which he, that speaks it, is exposed.

I hope it will be thought pertinent to this subject, to shew that frequency of elections was a part of the *British* constitution ; and that this letter contains no new doctrine advanced occasionally to irritate or perplex the minds of men ; but vindicates an ancient indefeasable right to which the people have an undoubted claim. Before the conquest parliaments were held three times every year, at Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide. At the time when the church of *Rome* claimed an *annuus censu* from *England*, *Edward* the first informs the pope, that some arrears had not been raised, *in parlamento, quod circa Octavas resurrectionis dominicae celebrari in anglia consuevit* ; *in the parliament which was usually held in England at Easter* ; and he promises that he will procure the payment thereof, *in alio parlamento nostro, quod ad finem sancti Michaelis proxime futuri intendimus dante domino celebrare* ; *in another parliament, which we intend to hold by God's permission after the feast of St. Michael next ensuing*. From hence it appears that *Edward* the first chose to labour under some difficulties, rather than to invade the privileges of his people by continuing a parliament beyond its accustomed time ; and that a new election ensued after a few months is evident from his own words, for *another* and a *new* parliament convey the same idea. I chuse to insist upon this point, because some sagacious gentlemen, modestly confess that frequent parliaments are required by our constitution, but confidently assert that frequent *new* parliaments were never thought necessary.

In the time of Edward the third, it was enacted,
*that for redress of divers mischiefs and grievances which
 daily happen, parliaments should be holden every year once or
 oftner if need be.* In the reign of that brutish cruel tyrant
 Richard the second, the commons signify in a remon-
 strance to their king, that he ought to call, *dominos &
 proceres regni atque communes, semel in anno ad parlia-
 mentum suum, tanquam ad summam curiam totius regni;*
 “the lords and the nobles of the kingdom, and the commons,
 “once in a year to his parliament, as to the highest council
 “of the realm.” And the reason is prefixed; *quod ex
 antiquo statuto habent, et consuetudine laudabili & ap-
 probata, cuius contrarietati dici non volebit.* “Because
 “this is agreeable to ancient statutes, and to a laudable ap-
 proved custom, the contrary to which cannot be defend-
 ed.” In another part it is said that if the king, *a parlia-
 mento suo se alienaverit suâ sponte, non aliqua infirmitate
 aut aliquâ alia de causa necessitatis, sed per immoderatam
 voluntatem protervè se subtraxerit per absentiam temporis
 quadraginta dierum, tanquam de vexatione populi sui et
 gravibus expensis eorum non curans, ex tunc licitum omni-
 bus et singulis eorum absque demigenio regis, redire ad
 propria et unicuique eorum in patriam suam remeare;*
 “shall voluntarily absent himself from his parliament, not
 “on account of any infirmity or other necessary cause, but
 “from a perverted inclination shall wanton'y withdraw for
 “the space of forty days, as if he disregarded the griev-
 “ances of his people and their heavy expences, it shall from
 “that time be lawful for all and each of them to return to
 his proper home.” This record proves that the king
 had no right either by statute or custom to extend the
 session beyond a stated time, which time is limited to
 one year; and that *if such incroachments were at-
 tempted, the commons had a power to dissolve them-
 selves.* I believe no person will suppose that such a
 remonstrance could have been made, if *Richard* had
 enjoyed the power of proroguing his parliament, or

if these commons had desired to stretch their power beyond the constitutional bounds. But prorogation was unknown in those days, and encroachments were detested by that parliament.

Thus far, my lord, it is evident that frequency of elections was required by the *British* constitution, and I am perswaded that good kings esteemed it a pillar of the throne and the strongest bulwark of their safety. To prove this truth inconceitably ; let us reflect, what princes invaded this national privilege, and what were the consequences of these invasions. *Richard* the second first packed a parliament, and then endeavoured to rule without it ; he was a wicked, ignorant inhuman tyrant, and by his vicious obstinacy lost his crown. *Henry* the eighth first began the great project for standing parliaments by his new scheme of prorogation on which he raised almost an absolute despotic power ; but he was a covetous, headstrong, debauched, ambitious prince. *Charles* the first was a weak king, led by the nose by an aspiring woman and a proud crafty priest; he prolonged a parliament and he lost his head. The second *Charles* was a mean corrupt sharper and buffoon, by turns a pandar to his own and to the vices of his favourites, he created that infamously memorable pension parliament, and he undid the nation. Such were the princes to whom standing parliaments owed their birth ; princes whose names shall be handed down to posterity with contempt and infamy, whose actions shall be read with horror ; of whom nothing better can be said than that their corrupt measures occasioned many revolutions, the sole blessing consequent of a bad king and a corrupt administration.

If our constitution requires new and frequent elections, if the prorogation of parliaments was justly esteemed an incroachment, and an arbitrary act : I would

would be obliged to him, who would inform me by what right any part of the legislature can destroy a fundamental law of that constitution, by which the whole legislature subsists : For a standing parliament seems to be a monster brought forth by faction and supported by corruption and ignorance ; and it brings this greater curse than other monsters, that it propagates its species.

It is said, that the legislature hath an absolute power, of which the people resign their share to their delegates; I grant that the people resign their whole power, but I affirm that the whole collective body is under limitations, under constitutional restraints ; and I hope a little reflection will make it evident : It was a law of our constitution that we should have a king, lords and commons, and we are thereby confined to these orders of government. Before a house of commons existed, it was a law that the people should frequently chuse new representatives ; a neglect of this law made it necessary for the legislature to interpose and to strengthen the constitution by statutes ordaining annual elections. These statutes were not made to alter the constitution and to confine elections to one year, but to prevent a longer neglect of them. The people therefore received from the constitution first, and next from statute a limited power of electing for such a time, and consequently can never delegate to the persons elected a more durable right. For till I can reconcile contradictions and make impossibilities possible, I cannot conceive that the power of a deputee can exceed his who deputed him.

I will suppose that the people should think it meet to send no representatives, and to grant no supplies, the crown would undoubtedly represent this conduct as seditious and destructive of the government ; why ? because it would be contrary to ancient usages and the constitution : But the same constitution and the same usages require new and frequent elections ; therefore by the like reasoning the people cannot delegate the power
of

of prolonging parliaments, nor ever pretended to do so; but from whence parliaments derive their authority, unless from the people, I am at a loss to determine.

If then a parliament chosen to represent the people during one year, shall assume the privilege of making laws during seven; I cannot think that such a parliament acts constitutionally, I know no name by which to call such a council, for to use my lord *Peterborough's* remark it is not created by the people but proceeding from itself. If the maxim be true, that he who knowingly treads in the bad steps of another is equally guilty, I might extend this reasoning much farther; but I chuse to be silent of these times and of present parliaments.

I shall proceed now, my lord; to examine the several arguments in favour of long parliaments, which have been invented by the wit of expecting state quacks, the hardened vice of hackneyed courtiers, and the sottish bigotry of voluntary slaves. The first great argument is, *that long parliaments prevent corruption and bribery, because when elections are less frequent, occasions of corruption will be fewer; and consequently idleness and debauchery will prevail less universally among the people.* If gentlemen who use this argument could prove it's truth, I should admit it's force, but it is one thing to affirm and another to prove; I readily grant that occasions of bribery will be fewer, but unless it appears that bribes will grow less, or will not increase, which I am sure courtiers would maintain if possible; without that evidence I never can admit that bribery will be prevented or idleness and debauchery less prevalent: We live in an age, when a seat in parliament is esteemed a property, and it has often been the foundation of dangerous property: It is natural that he who would make a purchase of that kind, should proportion his price to its continuance; an annuity for twenty, thirty, or forty years is surely preferable to one for three, five or seven years, and

and he who will buy his seat in parliament, will always consider for how much he can sell his voice there. But electors also will increase their prices and will insist upon them : Therefore allowing that bribery will prevail both in annual and septennial elections, but in different degrees, and that debauchery is certainly consequent of bribery, yet still reason inclines to annual parliaments ; for if an annual elector receives one pound for his vote, a septennial elector may fairly demand seven ; if then the former is enabled to spend one week in idleness, the latter may spend seven ; now whether more advantages can flow to the nation from seven continued weeks of idleness and debauchery, than from seven weeks so spent in so many different years, I think it is not difficult to determine. Seven weeks of debauchery may create such ruin to our manufactures, and such stagnation of trade as may never be recovered ; we may likewise be invaded during that time, and whether a nation which has been drunk six weeks would be prepared to repel an invasion in the seventh, will admit of some doubt ; besides if we can judge from observation, seven weeks is a sufficient time in which to contract a habit for life, and no habits obtain more easily than those which make their approaches by our senses. I think I may fairly extend this way of reasoning, and suppose a seat in parliament of thirty years continuance ; then an elector may receive as many pounds for his voice, may continue in idleness and debauchery as many weeks, and during his whole life never return to his employment with his wanted care and diligence : thus indolence may creep through the nation, manufactures may decay, trade will be grasped by other powers, and the once formidable *Britain* become the bubble of a few.

Another argument for a standing parliament is, that foreign powers will more readily contract with the crown,

crown, when the Prince can secure a parliamentary concurrence in his measures for a long time : for it is alledged, that neighbouring powers fear to concert a war vigorously with a *Briſh* prince, whose parliament, the very next year may disapprove his conduct and refuse to grant him supplies. If this reasoning be admitted, it will equally justify an overthrow of our whole constitution : for some aspiring powers might desire with like plausible excuse that we should give the whole legislative power to our prince, that he might have the right not only of declaring war and contracting alliances, but of levying taxes to support them ; and that they would not enter into treaty with us on other terms. Surely our island is in an abject state, when foreigners dare ask us to complement away our constitution, and when our lawgivers basely defend and gratify their desires. I think I should avoid society with a man who made it the condition of his friendship, that I should cut off a limb or pluck out an eye. Our alliances are dearly bought, if liberty is the price. Besides my Lord, all nations must despise a prince who would sap the foundation of that throne on which he sits, and give up the privileges of that people which supports him, to serve an im'rmediate purpose, to gratify a private resentment, or to remove a private fear.

A third argument long urged for standing parliaments is not less weak than wicked, which is, that they promote family interest, and prevent the people from having too much power. That the people may have too much power is undoubted ; that our constitution gives them too much is false ; that long parliaments take too much from them is true. I am convinced that the sole intent of establishing long parliaments was to promote family interest, to advance the gain and power of a few ; it was the project of a few who grasped at the power of the many : but can
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a *Briton* without a blush, without fear, without horror plead for abject slavery, and maintain that the national interest should yield to the private regard of a few families, or of the greatest family on earth? Courtiers may plead thus, slaves to passion and the dupes of a minister may defend such arguments; Wretches who build upon the ruin of their country, who proped by corruption and faction tower above merit and tread upon genius; but shall a *British* counsellor, the representative of a nation which once dictated to *Europe*, a man chosen to be the guardian of the people's rights, to be their advocate and friend, shall that man argue for corruption, for breach of trust, for neglect of allegiance to his constituents, for infidelity to man, and ingratitude to his God.

Some frivolous arguments for standing parliaments are yet unanswered, which will occur occasionally in other parts of this letter; I shall therefore proceed to a task more pleasing, and review the great advantages of short parliaments; and I believe it will appear to him who reflects on human nature that the shortest must be least corrupt.

Men have many different principles which influence their conduct; few are virtuous for virtue's sake; few will sacrifice the hopes of private gain, to the prospect of public interest: the love of applause and a sense of shame work most strongly in the generality of those whom we esteem to be good men; but the sense of shame, however universal, is a narrow principle, whose influence on our actions is easily overpowered; it frequently extends our views little farther than our circle of acquaintance, and while we can look on them without a blush, we flatter ourselves that our case is not desperate. Now he who has been during seven, ten, or twenty years in the glare of a court, where the tongue and countenance are ever at variance with the heart; where men

are

are hired to prate away truth, and to laugh virtue out of company ; this man is much more likely to forget that frank honest spirit, which he breathed among his constituents, than he who carries it annually to parliament, there lets it flow for his country's service, and then retires to reap the fruits of his toil. The former will feel his rough simplicity, and open candour refined and polished by degrees into blind submission and state compliance ; and if the sense of shame alone made him act well before, it will make him a villain now ; for he will associate with those whom once he despised, lest he should be the subject of their mirth and ridicule. Add to this a strong love of gain which actuates many, earnest solicitations, and the various baits and lures of ministers, by whom all hell's agents are employed to find the ruling passions of those whom they would entrap ; for passions are the handles by which artful intriguing ministers lead reverend asses and right honourable dupes. Besides, many men could resist even the allurements of interest during one year, who would faint and give way in three, five or seven.

If such evils may and do attend long parliaments ; if our constitution has provided even against possible miseries, and if nothing but annual elections can prevent corruption, then no other expedient can save our island from slavery and ruin ; but that annual parliaments can prevent corruption, seems demonstrable. Candidates neither would nor could bribe yearly ; electors would blush to ask a bribe ; the jobs of a year would not deserve a ministerial reward, and what is more convincing, the whole treasury, nay the whole revenue of the kingdom would not enable a minister to bribe the people every year to send him a corrupt parliament, and then to pay that parliament for its corrupt services.

From such hints joined to your Lordship's observation, if it appears that faction is the parent of a standing parliament and corruption its offspring, that from the very nature of man frequent new parliaments are less exposed to temptations. I may with greater advantage shew their real and political uses, which I shall confine principally to three points: they are necessary, first to prevent encroachments either from the crown or the people; secondly, to give the people a proper occasion of expressing their approbation or dislike of their representatives; and thirdly, to examine the conduct and correct the abuses of the ministry.

That encroachments may begin on the part of the crown, cannot with modesty be denied: speculative statesmen may decorate shadows, and distinguish away reality; they may pretend that the privileges of the people are not invaded, because the prerogative is not directly increased; but how will the consequence differ if I am made stronger than my opponent, or he is made weaker than me: coercive and penal laws may be multiplied to such excess, that the people shall never know when they tread on sure ground, that their conversation shall be cramped and enslaved, and their sentiments catch the disorder; that they shall forget the very name of liberty, or hear it with sickly despair, as a thing much wished but not to be expected. If the people are undone, it is no consolation, that the prerogative was not directly extended. Therefore frequent new parliaments are necessary to check the most indirect attacks from the crown. But the nobles may encroach on the prerogative of the prince, and a weak ministry may not perceive it, and a corrupt standing parliament which has

been accustomed to receive its mandates from the minister, may construe his ignorance and silence into approbation, and therefore may shut their eyes against such invasions : to prevent this evil, frequent elections are necessary. I doubt not that the crown will always be watchful to check encroachments from the people ; yet even the people, I mean their representative, may distress the crown by refusing to grant supplies necessary to support it ; and should a standing parliament be thus obstinately unjust, the prince would find it a standing evil ; for if the people who hold the sword, should be convinced of the justice of such parliamentary proceedings, which a remittance of taxes would powerfully effect, the throne would probably totter and the crown lose its lustre : however, I am not afraid of such measures from a standing parliament, and I mention this case only to shew that while elections are frequent, the crown cannot be distressed more than one year ; for if the demands of the prince are just, and his subjects have cause to love him, they will send him a parliament the next year, which will support him with magnificence in all equitable measures, and no council should support his injustice.

A second use of short parliaments is, to give the people an opportunity of approving or disapproving their representatives ; the people constitute particular persons to be the guardians of their rights, promoters of trade, and stewards of the public treasure : if in one year they should betray these rights, sacrifice this trade, and lavish this treasure ; what can be more just, than that the people should have a speedy occasion of expressing their abhorrence of such enemies, and of electing new representatives to heal the wounds in the constitution before time hath made them incurable ? Can good representatives

sentatives enjoy higher delight, or receive more true glory, than to be approved annually by the voice of a free people, and re-elected to serve them in a council, which, by constitution, is the greatest on earth? The commons originally were the hired servants of the people, and should be their stewards now; good stewards will chuse to give a fair account of their conduct as frequently as possible; and if they are bad, they should be removed from their trust.

In a government, my Lord, which permits long parliaments the very virtue of the people may prove their ruin. All mankind are liable to error; the most upright people may be, and are most likely to be deceived by appearances; a majority of hypocrites may obtain seats in parliament, and then may throw off the mask; yet still the people have acted right; they chose men that were seemingly most virtuous, and it would have been a crime to chuse others: it is true, they were deceived, but their honesty deceived them; shall they be miserable perpetually, because they have been mistaken once, because they have been honest? They are unfortunate, and their misfortune is one of the strongest reasons why they should return to a new election when the session is concluded! If they re-elect bad men, the crime is their own, and they deserve its consequences. But while elections are annual and grievances are fresh, the people will not re-elect bad men, because in such cases they can receive no bribe for which they would sell even the liberty of their posterity.

It hath been said, that no advantage accrued to the nation from that occasion of approving or disapproving their representatives, which frequent elec-

tions afford, because the corruption of the people is such, that they will chuse placemen, who can spend the most money. It affords a kind of pleasure, that those gentlemen, who plead for standing parliaments, draw one argument from open corruption, and, because a great evil prevails, maintain that we should establish and legitimate a much greater. No man loves placemen more than I do, while they continue in their proper places ; and I think it possible, that a placeman may serve his country in parliament ; but it seems very probable that he will not : I am sure the people can always find men less exceptionable, and if the luxury of the people now recommends placemen, I will venture to affirm, that long parliaments first caused that corruption, and annual elections alone will check and restrain it.

It is objected, that the members cannot in one year learn the busines of parliament, and therefore that frequent elections rather retard than facilitate affairs. This objection is ridiculous, unjust and wicked : every man of common understanding can know the constitution, and every member, before he takes his seat, should know the general interest of the kingdom. Perhaps, by the busines of parliament nothing more is meant than the forms ; for, surely, gentlemen would never insinuate, that the representatives of the people should go to parliament as to school, to learn matter for debate and modes of address. I wish many members had been longer at school, and spent their time much better before they went to parliament, but I would be sorry that they should enter under any task-master there, lest they should learn what a parliament may do, not w^tat it ought. Probably the busines of parliament includes the mysteries of the ministry, which

which I believe are many, and such, that he who shall grow old in the service of his country will never know them. There are plots and counterplots, schemes to unravel, and schemes to perplex; very extraordinary demands for most extraordinary services, great promises, vigorous preparations, and — oh! what performances? The little ends proposed by these, and the great calamities consequent thereof, are to wind up the last scence of this great tragedy of errors.

But the nation has had, and will have, better counsellors during short than long parliaments; while elections are annual, we shall have a nation of statesmen; how many now despair of an occasion to serve their country, whose honesty and love of glory would prompt them, in other circumstances, to toil and labour for the public good. Every year, which is added to the duration of parliaments, robs the nation of a proportionable number of good servants; and annual parliaments will produce seven times more statesmen, than septennial parliaments; for knowledge and science, like our manufactures, are the effect of encouragement.

A third great use of short parliaments is, to examine the conduct and correct the abuses of ministers; and it will be necessary to shew, that this advantage cannot be obtained so surely from standing parliaments. Frequent new parliaments cannot forget the design for which they are assembled, long parliaments may; the former will remember who created them, the latter may think they gave being to themselves: short parliaments will dispatch affairs with vigour, they will be ambitious to recommend themselves to their constituents by their diligence

diligence as well as integrity ; long parliaments may delay business this session, because they will have the power of transacting it in the next ; but the delay of the national business is the delay of justice ; it is the greatest offence against society, because not one alone but every individual suffers immediately by it ; and in the mean time the public accounts may become so complicated, that they will never be explained.

Perhaps it appears already which species of parliaments will best promote the ends of a bad ministry ; but it will be more evident if we consider, in which parliament a bad minister is best able to obtain and support a majority in his favour. A minister may possibly pack one, two or three annual parliaments, but all his labour of three years may be overturned in the fourth ; a chain of bad measures requires a chain of supports. If the same parliament subsists seven years, how many persons may be gratified with places, how many buoyed up with expectations, and how many flattered into compliance ? Besides a corrupt minister has sufficient time, in seven years, to digest his plan, and to fix his agents for the ensuing election. To some he will send binding orders from the treasury ; and placemen must exceed all others in expences, or they will soon be unplaced. Thus a minister forms his clan, and then defies opposition ; the public accounts are neglected, or so examined as will best suit with his purposes ; the nation is blundered into misfortunes ; complaint is termed sedition, and every man who pleads for the liberty of his country is branded with disaffection, and treated like the greatest enemy. When discontent grows clamorous, and misery unsupportable ; when the public voice demands an enquiry, this great pilot quits the helm,

after

after he has steered the national vessel, by means of a long parliament, into shoals and quicksands.

If such consequences flow from long parliaments, and if parliaments are absolutely requisite, then I conclude, that the shortest are the best.

Another great and necessary use of short parliaments is, to inform the prince of the sentiments of his subjects : without this knowledge no ruler can be secure, and a virtuous prince cannot be happy. He that would build his throne in the hearts of his people, will chuse to know their hearts ; and a *British* prince can only know them from frequent new parliaments, which come fraught with their sentiments, boldly utter their complaints, or gladly proclaim their satisfaction. A long parliament seldom attends to the people's voice, and bad men will think it their interest to drive unpleasing truths from the prince's ear, lest he should enquire into the cause, and remove evil counsellors from his presence. It is agreed by all, that his people's affections are the strongest guard which can environ a prince, what then shall we think of those, who suffer just complaints to be unheard, and public grievances unredressed, till discontent is inflamed into sedition ?

Courtiers have pleaded, that annual parliaments are too great a check on the crown, and none but courtiers would plead thus. Short parliaments cannot weaken the just prerogative of the prince ; but long parliaments may give an unjust power, which I hope no *Englishman* will defend. It is likewise said, that the ministry would change annually with the parliament ; but this is not probable,

bable, I am sure it is not necessary ; yet there have been times when any change in the ministry would be a blessing.

If standing parliaments are at all times contrary to our constitution, because inconsistent with liberty ; they are so more particularly, when placemen are grown a burthen to the nation, and numerous employments have furnished the minister with an army of civil officers, who like veterans will know no standard but his. But I can say, from undoubted authority, that thirty years ago, the public funds produced three millions of money ; and these, though the property of private persons, are under the management of the officers of the crown, which must create such dependancy on the ministry, as will invade, and at last destroy all freedom of elections. I desire therefore to submit one question to your Lordship ; Whether a parliament, which obeys the dictates of a minister, and subverts, in all essential points the design of its institution, may not forfeit its right to a share in the legislature ? For in my private opinion it deserves no better fate than befel that prince whose head payed the price of his tyranny.

Thus far, my Lord, I have attempted to state a fair account of popular elections ; and since frequent new parliaments were a part of our constitution, which bad kings alone invaded, and which good kings endeavoured to confirm and secure by laws restraining a long abuse of this privilege ; since the two great evils, which have ruined every state, *fætion* and *corruption*, are best prevented by adhering to our constitution ; and the strongest union is thereby established between the king and his people ; and likewise, because long parliaments place

place the legislative power in fewer hands, and consequently introduce either indolence and ignorance (which beget superstition and blind obedience) or discontent and jealousy which ripen into discord and sedition ; therefore I conclude that every check on the rotation of offices is or mu^t be destructive to the commonwealth. I hope I have been dispassionate in my private search, because I determined to espouse that opinion which most favoured the interest of my country, to that I confess I am partial, and your Lordship, of all men living, will excuse such partiality.

There is yet a possible case in which a standing parliament may be a blessing. If a prince should grace the throne, endued with wisdom superior to the little arts of governing by party or faction ; able to penetrate into that great subordination of interests which constitute the national good ; a quick discerner of the spirits of societies and of individuals ; whose heart had been practised to feel for his people, and whose head and hands had learned to obey its dictates ; who shared toil with the meanest, and danger with the boldest ; who was the sovereign in every thing but self-gratification, and who judged himself placed highest, only that he might be the greatest servant of his people : should such a prince obtain a parliament composed of men like himself, and of equal continuance, with what glory would his reign be distinguished ? *The eye would bless him when it saw him, and the ear would rejoice to hear his praise* ; instead of murmurings and complaints, the voice of mirth and of peace should be heard in our streets, the peasant should smile upon toil, and the artificer sing to his art ; the prince should lie down without fear, and rise to no care, but for his people's safety ; good education and sound discipline should flow from good laws, and I should only

fear that a virtuous people would forget that such a prince was a mortal, and in that delusion confer on him despotic power.

I confess, my Lord, that if I was divested of all concern for posterity ; if my hopes and views were as confined as my being here, I should wish to live under such a prince and such a parliament. But while I have the feelings and the passions of humanity, I have a tender regard for those who shall survive me, and derive a present pleasure from barely intending the happiness of thousands yet unborn.

Therefore while I praise a possible good, I would not perswade men through expectation of it, to involve themselves in a probable misfortune. Though monsters are frequent, we ought not to expect miracles, and yet perhaps nothing but a miracle can save us. When we speculate in order to practise, we must reason as men ; we must examine as well what human nature is, as what it should be : We shall then find that evils are more frequent than blessings, and that the reverse of all which I have hitherto supposed is most likely to happen. Then, what will be the consequence of a standing parliament ?

I am unwilling even to suppose that a bad prince will ever rule over us ; yet, since it is but supposition, and our lot has sometimes been actually unfortunate, your lordship will readily excuse me. Some future king may be violent in his passions and weak in his judgement ; under shews of integrity and blunt simplicity he may disguise his ignorance and

and his arrogance ; and therefore may perpetually sacrifice his own honour, and the honour of his country, to his pride and intemperance ; or, a prince, like other men, may be governed by strong prejudices, he may prefer that part of his dominions in which he is absolute to all others ; and therefore may neglect or disgrace his freeborn soldiers and ablest generals to aggrandize his slaves ; he may likewise exhaust the treasury of a great commonwealth, to adorn the bleak mountains of his own little estate or sovereignty, and to exhibit the magnificence of a *British* prince in a corner of the earth, where his ancestors were scarce heard of, and from which they were called, like *David* from his sheep-fold, to a constitution founded on liberty. I can conceive it possible that such a prince would entrust the administration of his public affairs to a fool who can flatter his own foibles, and to a knave who can impose upon his people : The former of these, by the help of great alliances, of dangerous property and royal bounty, may tride over the great legislative council of the realm ; and the latter by like means may become dictator to a corrupt standing parliament, which will perpetually approve the conduct of these twin stars. If among five hundred and fifty-eight persons chosen to act in trust for the whole nation, two hundred should at any time be the hired Servants of these ministers, bought to do jobbs on pain of forfeiture : On such supposition I might pronounce of a nation, “ how art thou fallen.”

But, my lord, this night-piece may yet be darker; for I can suppose that a bad ministry and a corrupt parliament will entrench themselves behind a military force, which will increase annually with their fears; that, so guarded, they may regale themselves

felves with the sacrifice of a whole nation, while the sword shall silence the voice of justice, and public offenders shall escape by private acquittances. In such circumstances, if the successor of the prince, whom I have supposed, should possess great abilities inflamed by restless ambition, he would find the way paved to despotic power; and a weak passive successor would be the dupe of his ministers; who in every peevish fit would threaten to abandon him, and place the crown on another head: For a wicked ministry, a corrupt parliament, and a standing military force, linked in one interest, are like the *Gordian knot*, which *Alexander* took the shortest and best method to dissolve.

I would not, my lord, set up horrid shapes, merely to gratify fancy; therefore I beg leave to strengthen supposition by facts, and by such as will deserve our attention, though we are removed by many centuries from the time of their action.

When *Oetavius Cæsar* had triumphed over opposition, the dread of his uncle's fate prompted him to a resignation of his power; but a subtil minister perswaded him that he had gone too far to retreat with safety, therefore he should advance his power above controul: That aspiring, revengeful, cruel youth was dazled with the prospect, and now dreamed of happiness only in the wreath of power, and bent all his force to twist it round his own brow. His first artifice was to gain the compliance of the senate, the sure ground on which he might build to what height he pleased. The civil wars had occasioned many vacancies in the senate; these were supplied by creatures whose being depended on *Cæsar's* breath; some of the old class were won by real grants, others were allured by promises, and

and many were seduced by their own hopes ; thus the senate became his own, and his next step could not fail to set him highest. He had gained the purse of the commonwealth, and only wanted the sword to protect it : Therefore he raised a thousand doubts and fears, of which his own disposition was very fruitful : He took occasion, from the discontent of *Brutus* his surviving friends, to hint that the city was exposed to sedition and violent commotions ; his docile parliament took the signal, and permitted him to keep twelve thousand soldiers near the city's gates, another great body in *Italy*, and a vast Army in the Provinces, amounting in the whole to an hundred and seventy thousand Men : Propped on the shoulders of a corrupt senate and a dependant army, he had nothing now to fear, had not nature stamped much caution in him : His timorous spirit still haunted him, and persuaded him to sap, by fair hypocrisy, that constitution, which he might have overturned by force. He preserved the form of government to satisfy near-sighted fools who saw no farther ; he made some useful laws which seemed extraordinary to men who had almost forgot the name of virtue ; he paid much outward deference to the senate, and because he suffered them to enjoy a large nominal authority, they perpetually enlarged his real power, till they placed him above law, where nothing but private justice could assault him.

My lord, I shall make no comparison ; I hope our ministers will not advance beyond a possibility of retreat, and that *Great Britain* will never behold a parliament created by the ministry to nurse and feed a military force. Since an hundred and seventy thousand men were sufficient to enslave the whole world, I hope we shall never support a standing army equal to the tenth part of the *Roman*.

But,

But, my lord, if ever long parliaments should entail long woes upon us, if a tide of corruption should render it impossible for the best and greatest men to serve their country by just means ; if your lordship can testify that the miserable æra is already come, in which it is the greatest glory of a *British* patriot to disclaim alliance with office, and to shake off the robe of power, because it galls the shoulders of integrity ; I shall then submit to your judgement, whether any thing can save us from violent convulsions, and a scene of blood, except a PATRIOT PRINCE who will resolutely break from the shackles of courtiers and ministers, throw himself on the affections of his people, and demand a virtuous parliament to examine past measures, and to restore freedom and frequency of elections ; who will remove that artillery which corruption and faction plant round a throne to be discharged against truth and liberty, and submit his whole conduct to the public judgement : I believe such a prince by such conduct would yet re-establish our constitution, and restore virtue to favour : I believe he would yet find subjects who would sacrifice property and life in his service, and conduct him victorious to the gates of the greatest city in *Europe*, or die in his service.

But if this be delayed, our cup of iniquity will soon be full ; and nothing will avail but divine vengeance immediately hurled against us ; whether that vengeance should waste us by a plague, or a civil war ; the prince may possibly find himself superior to the peasant only in guilt and misery ; a *painful pre-eminence*.

I fear I have dwelled on this ungrateful subject too long for him, whose delicate feelings for others are

are the sources of his greatest pain. But permit me to go still farther. Your Lordship may yet turn your eyes to a scene more affecting ; to a kingdom, which in itself has neither constitution nor legislature, though intitled by all rights, divine and human, to every article of the *British* constitution ; to a kingdom which has felt our power, and must share our destruction, though it never shared our glory, nor tasted our happiness ; which has long been scourged, not governed by the gleanings of our island ; where seats in parliament are publicly bought and sold, and the members may grow old with princes or their ministers in corruption and iniquity ; where a *cabal*, a *rotten junto* tramples down worth, and buoys up the scum of the kingdom ; where industry is checked because it has raised a spirit of independance in a northern province ; where a great city has been insulted, abused and chastised, by a man who has disgraced the noble name which fortune blindly gave him ; a kingdom in which public justice yields to party-prejudice, and an ignorant smooth-faced high-priest secretly prophanes his sacred order, by attempting to increase political grievances, and to saddle the nation with new Taxes, because it can no longer gratify his idle vanity.

My Lord, I am unable to paint the misery which I have beheld, and much more unfit to prescribe the remedies : I see the storm, and wish that the vessels were navigated by other hands, by skillfull and honest men, who would, as your Lordship ever did, and I hope ever will, prefer the national good to private interest, and the conscience of virtue to the splendor of a court, or the stupid admiration of knaves and sycophants.

I am,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's, &c.

Axon

